



**Testimony of the Alliance for Children's Mental Health (ACMH)  
Before the Appropriations Committee  
February 23, 2017**

**Department of Public Health (DPH) budget cuts and changes  
H.B. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM FY 2017-18**

**OPPOSITION to:**

**Proposed 10% cut to School Based Health Centers**

Good afternoon Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Senator Osten, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Susan Kelley, and I am Director of the Alliance for Children's Mental Health (ACMH) (formerly, KTP Children's Committee). ACMH is a statewide policy and advocacy group in that focuses solely on children's mental health issues, including the critical overlap of mental health with child-serving systems such as education, child welfare, and juvenile justice in Connecticut. Through our collective voice, we advocate for smart policy and better outcomes for all children in the state. I am here today to testify in opposition to proposed cuts to the DPH budget concerning School Based Health Centers (SBHCs).

We are mindful of our state's fiscal crisis, and very much appreciate all of your many hours of hard work to find workable and balanced solutions in the face of so many competing yet compelling interests.

*The proposed 10% cut to SBHCs, which comes on the heels of cuts of over \$1.3 million to SBHCs since 2015, will have significant negative impact on children with behavioral health issues and their families.*

SBHCs are an established and key part of the behavioral health care system for children in the state and yet the DPH budget proposes to cut SBHCs by 10% which amounts to \$1,128,063. These combined cuts are dramatic, representing a total of \$2.5 million reduction to SBHCs since January of 2015. The 96 state-funded SBHCs in Connecticut serve approximately 40,000 children, providing a wide spectrum of clinical services, including primary care, behavioral health services and, in some sites, oral health services. Because SBHCs provide services where kids are—in schools—they are an effective means for children to access behavioral health services, particularly for children who live in low-income and underserved communities.

Three sites in Norwich closed this summer due to recent past cuts. The proposed cuts could lead to more closures, which will leave more children without the critical safety net services they are now receiving through their SBHC.

*In addition, the proposed cuts go against the state's central strategy of early intervention/prevention in children's mental health, particularly in schools, as articulated in the PA 13-178 Children's Behavioral Health Plan. This strategy is critical because it saves the state money.*

Through early intervention/preventative care, children with current and emerging behavioral health needs get the care they need before more intensive, costlier interventions and treatments are required, including parents taking their children to hospital emergency departments in crisis situations. A news article by the CT Health I-Team came out yesterday highlighting the lack of availability of community mental health services leading to large volume of children going to the Emergency Departments of hospitals for acute behavioral health care. Here is the link to the article: <http://c-hit.org/2017/02/21/pediatric-psychiatric-cases-continue-climbing-swamping-ers>

Behavioral health services through SBHCs; initiatives moving towards integration of behavioral health into primary care settings through programs such as the State Innovation Model (SIM); consultative services through the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) Access Mental Health program (a program that provides consultative services between pediatricians and psychiatrists); and mental health services by counselors and other clinicians in schools are ALL effective means for providing access to services for children with behavioral health needs. Currently, there are not sufficient community based services to meet the behavioral health needs of children. The combination of all of the above services—including SBHCs—is required to meet the needs of children with behavioral health problems in the state, and to provide access to services in schools where children, particularly from low income families, can best receive them.

As indicated in the above news article, many “families are really struggling to find services in the community.” The short-sighted answer is cuts to SBHCs. The more cost-effective solution is to keep a combination of behavioral health services in place, including services through SBHCs, so children have access to treatments they need and the state doesn't have to incur the costs of later, costlier interventions.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan R. Kelley, JD

**Director, Alliance for Children's Mental Health (ACMH)**

**Director of Children's Policy, NAMI Connecticut**

ACMH is housed at NAMI Connecticut; NAMI Connecticut is a member participant and fiduciary for AMCH

Organizations/individuals joining in the above testimony:

NAMI Connecticut

CTJJA

Empowering Children and Families

CT Legal Services

Ann Nelson, parent

Kids in Crisis

### **ACMH Member Participants**

This list of member participants does not indicate that each organization or individual joins in the above ACMH testimony.

Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (CTJJA)  
CT Legal Services  
CT Community Non Profit Alliance  
Family Forward Advocacy CT  
FAVOR  
African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP)  
Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families (CAFAF)  
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Connecticut (NAMI Connecticut)  
National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut  
Child Guidance Center of Southern CT  
The Village of Children and Families  
Jesse Lewis Choose Love Foundation  
Susan Graham, Family Champion and CONNECT consultant  
Christine Rowan, Parent (Newtown)  
Lori Clemente, Parent (Haddam)  
David Marcus, Parent, Innovative Advocacy Solutions LLC  
Connecticut Association of School Based Health Centers  
Yale School of Public Health  
Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI)  
Child First  
Office of the Child Advocate  
Stamford Youth Services Bureau  
Achievement First  
Early Childhood Alliance  
Empowering Children and Families  
Kids in Crisis  
CT Voices for Children  
Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA)  
Dr. Mirela Loftus, Child Psychiatrist, Institute of Living,  
President Elect, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry